



**Testimony in Support of SB 763 and HB 5174 and  
in Opposition to HB 6714.**

**Submitted by Det. Derek Puorro, Feb. 16, 2017  
before the Public Safety Committee**

---

Good morning Chairmen Larson, Guglielmo and Verrengia, and members of the Public Safety. My name is Derek Puorro. I am a Middletown Police Detective and Chairman of the Public Safety Committee of Council 4 AFSCME. Our Committee is the voice of 2,400 unionized police officers across Connecticut.

The police officers we proudly represent put their lives on the line every day to protect our communities and keep us safe. We are here to thank you for raising Senate Bill 763 for hearing and to urge your support of this proposed bill.

SB 763 would expand workers' compensation coverage to police officers, fire fighters and ambulance workers who suffer severe mental or emotional impairment, including Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, on the job.

More than 30 states cover PTSD under workers compensation – including New York and all the New England states – but Connecticut is not one of them. SB 763 is an overdue fix to this unfortunate situation that was created with the destruction of workers' compensation benefits back in 1993.

I can tell you first-hand that PTSD is a serious problem. It's a debilitating condition caused by trauma with symptoms that range from emotional detachment and inability to feel pleasure to severe anxiety, insomnia, hostile behavior, blackouts and thoughts of suicide.

Across the state, in large cities and small towns, police officers suffer from PTSD that is the result of responding to violent incidents. The most notable example is the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre.

One of the first responders that terrible day was Newtown Police Officer Thomas Bean. He was diagnosed with PTSD and unable to return to work. His pay was cut by 50%, and the town tried to stop his disability payments.

I vividly remember a Hartford Courant article in which Officer Bean spoke frankly about the permanent trauma he suffered. "Officer Bean was killed that day," he told the Courant, referring to the massacre. "I can never be that person again."

Getting through a normal day has been a struggle for Officer Bean, who has trouble sleeping and suffers crippling flashbacks.

Sadly, there are many stories like Officer Bean's. They are stories of courage and grace under the most extreme pressure. But they are also stories of emotional and financial hardship that never ends. We can no longer afford to ignore the cost of psychological injuries and trauma suffered by those who keep us safe and keep us out of harm's way.

Our union believes the exclusion of PTSD under our workers' comp laws makes no sense, and costs our society more in the long run. Absent coverage, my fellow men and women in blue are forced to keep working when they should be getting help, because they fear losing their jobs and livelihoods.

Again, we thank you for raising SB 763 and urge your support.

AFSCME police unions also want to go on record in support of **H.B. No. 5174, AN ACT CONCERNING THE PENALTY FOR ASSAULT OF AN OFF-DUTY POLICE OFFICER OR DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION EMPLOYEE.**

The purpose of this bill is to establish a penalty for the assault of a reasonably identifiable off-duty police officer and employee of the Department of Correction.

Police officers put their lives on the line to protect the public whether they are on-duty or off-duty. We believe this bill will protect police officers when they are off-duty from criminals who want to take retribution against those officers and will ensure that any criminal who sees a police officer out of uniform is appropriately charged for committing an assault against that officer.

As police officers, we are sworn to protect the public. That responsibility does not stop when our shift ends. Often times, police officers will do what is necessary to protect the public from harm even when they are off-duty. This puts them at risk of being assaulted without the ability to call for backup as they would when they are on-duty.

In today's anti-police environment, this proposed bill would provide law enforcement with a much needed tool in protecting officers. That's why we support HB 5174 and urge your support, too.

Finally our union opposes **H.B. No. 6714 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEFENSE WEAPONS BY POLICE OFFICERS.** We do not see any need for this legislation. It seems redundant as a law was passed in 2014 requiring reporting to the state on any use of an electronic defense weapon by a police officer. This reporting is going on. More and more of a police officer's time is spent filling out paperwork and reporting on taser incidents, traffic stops, accident reports, incident reports and the like. The public would be better served if officers were allowed to spend more time on actual policing and serving the public. We urge you to reject this bill as it seems to be more micromanagement.

Thank you very much for hearing our testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions.